

South Elkhorn Mountains (171,059 acres)



Figure 10. South Elkhorn Mountains Focus Area

The South Elkhorn Mountains area is a diverse landscape with vegetation and topography more typical of central Montana than the intermountain western portion of Montana. Sagebrush grasslands and broken and rough terrain are found throughout much of this area, although much of the southern portion has been converted to dryland grain and CRP grasslands. Mule deer and antelope are common throughout much of the South Elkhorn Mountains area, and greater sage-grouse were rumored to have been common prior to the loss of much of their primary sagebrush habitat. In the northern portion of this area, as the mountainous portion of the Elkhorn Mountains is approached, the common geologic formations are limestone ridges and outcrops. These ridges provide the environment for abundant stands of mountain mahogany, which among other things makes this area very attractive as mule deer winter range.

Landscape Characteristics

This subsection consists of mountains and foothills that formed in limestone, dolomite, argillite, andesite, sandstone, and quartzite. Elevations range from 4,500 to 7,500 feet. Drainage density is low. Mean annual precipitation ranges from 12 to 22 inches, with about 30 percent falling as snow. The soil temperature and moisture regimes are frigid (cryic at higher elevations) and aridic ustic. The primary natural disturbance is fire. Another important natural biotic disturbance is beaver activity in riparian areas. Land use is predominantly livestock grazing and timber harvest. The breakdown for land stewardship in the South Elkhorn Mountains area is as follows:

U.S. Federal Agencies:	71,105 acres, or 41.6% of total area, which include:
BLM:	8,494 acres, or 5% of total area

USFS: 22,610 acres, or 13.2% of total area
 State Agencies: 6,425 acres, or 3.7% of total area
 Private: 93,529 acres, or 54.7% of total area

Associated Habitats

Habitat	Habitat Tier	Percentage of Area
Lodgepole Pine	III	2.12
Montane Parkland and Subalpine Meadows	III	3.42
Rocky Mountain Juniper	III	7.41
Mixed Xeric Forest	III	7.54
Douglas Fir	II	8.17
Very Low Cover Grasslands	I	13.66
Sagebrush	I	22.13
Low/Moderate Cover Grasslands	I	28.70

Note: A total of 93.14% of the South Elkhorn Mountains area is represented; 6.86% is made up of a combination of other habitat types.

Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need (Tier I Species)

There are a total of 243 terrestrial vertebrate species that are found within the South Elkhorn Mountains Focus Area. Tier I species are listed below. All associations can be found in Table 16.

Amphibians: Western Toad and Northern Leopard Frog

Birds: Bald Eagle and Black-backed Woodpecker

Mammals: Townsend's Big-eared Bat, Pallid Bat, Gray Wolf, and Canada Lynx

Conservation Concerns & Strategies

Conservation Concerns	Conservation Strategies
Habitat loss, degradation, and fragmentation, especially as a result of human population growth	Support strategic conservation easements/protection by conservation organizations or public agencies by providing advice and technical assistance
	Support state/federal tax incentives that discourage habitat fragmentation
	Promote and further develop county ordinances that help plan for and manage development
	Support state/federal tax incentives that discourage habitat fragmentation

Range or forest management practices	Support government and private conservation activities that encourage and support sustainable land management practices (example; rest and rotation schedules)
Streamside residential development	Develop statewide riparian best management principles
Invasive or exotic plant species	Participate in partnerships to develop and implement weed control strategies

References

The Nature Conservancy. 2000. Middle Rockies-Blue Mountains Ecoregional Conservation Plan. Prepared by the Middle Rockies-Blue Mountains Planning Team. 58 pp + appendices.